

Display of Black-bellied Bustard *Eupodotis melanogaster*

On 23 April 1986, late on a dull cloudy afternoon after a heavy shower of rain on the slopes of Menengai, 0°15'S, 36°03'E, near Nakuru, Kenya, a male Black-bellied Bustard *Eupodotis melanogaster* took off from the ground and flew vigorously, flapping its wings, in irregular circles, both left and right handed, until it gained a height of at least 500 m above the ground. It did not make use of thermals, of which there were probably none at that time. It then descended to about 300 m, also in irregular circles, with its wings held stiffly horizontal, and allowing its white primaries to flutter, causing a fairly considerable noise. The process was then repeated several times but it was not observed to conclusion.

Again, on 6 June 1986, on a similar cloudy evening after a heavy shower of rain at the same site, a bird was seen flying vigorously so high as to make identification impossible with the naked eye. With the use of x 10 binoculars it was confirmed that this was again a male Black-bellied Bustard. Soon it made the same descent that had been observed in April, holding its wings horizontal and allowing the primaries to flutter, but it was also observed that the tail was spread in delta formation. It was too far off to hear any sound, but it was possible to see the termination of the descent, again at an estimated 300 m above the ground. Finally, when the rigid wings were folded, the bird also briefly bent its tail forward and its neck backwards over its back in a typical bustard 'rocketing' position. It then resumed the vigorous circling flight to regain height and to repeat the performance.

The bustard continued this display many times, one of which was timed when the ascent started at 18:52, and maximum altitude was gained at 18:57, five minutes later. The descent took approximately half a minute. Finally, at 19:03, it stopped, 20 min after sundown, when it glided down to approximately the same place that the bird had been seen taking off from in April, indicating that it was probably the same bird on the same territory.

Allowing 5½ min for each performance would mean that it had repeated the display some eight or nine times since it was first seen—already performing—at 18:15. The amount of energy expended must have been considerable.

The *whoo-it...cluck* call which is made during the neck-bending/stretching display was frequently heard during these months from this bustard's territory.

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Scopus 11: 52, September 1987

Received 20 November 1986

Numbers of Dwarf Bitterns *Ixobrychus sturmii* displaying

On 3 April 1985 between 12:30 and 13:30 at a small dam on Kulalu Ranch at 3°13'S, 39°25'E, Coast Province, Kenya, several Dwarf Bitterns *Ixobrychus sturmii* were seen displaying. The dam covered about a hectare with shallow flooded edges through which tall grass and small trees with sparse foliage protruded. The Dwarf Bitterns flew repeatedly at about 2 m above the flooded grass, and then perched in prominent positions in the small trees. Their legs and

feet were bright orange in colour. It was impossible to accurately estimate the numbers present, but there were probably at least six and possibly many more. There was a continuous low note call, the source of which was impossible to identify. Also present were a few other herons, egrets, ducks, geese and approximately 50 Open-billed Storks *Anastomus lamelligerus*.

On 20 April 1985 this dam was again visited at mid-day. No display flights were seen, but three or four Dwarf Bitterns were flushed from the flooded grass. Only one of these birds had orange legs and feet, the others were yellow. A heron-like *squaak* was heard, but again, the source could not be identified. Unfortunately later observation to check if breeding had taken place was impossible.

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Scopus 11: 52-53, September 1987

Received 20 November 1986

Black mamba takes Northern Crombec from mobbing bird group

On reading Ginn's (1986) account of a boomslang *Dispholidus typus* striking out at members of a mobbing group of birds, we were reminded of an episode involving a mobbing bird group and a snake—a black mamba *Dendroaspis angusticeps*—in Kenya. Ginn wondered whether the boomslang was attempting to scare off the birds by striking at them, or was perhaps attempting to catch one; in any event, it failed to obtain prey in this case.

On 8 December 1981, north-east of Koru, western Kenya, at 1560 m, we were examining a stump used for roosting by Yellow-billed Barbets *Trachyphonus purpuratus* when our attention was attracted by calling birds, especially Placid [Olive Mountain] Greenbuls *Phyllastrephus placidus* and Northern Crombets *Sylvietta brachyura*, but also including two White-browed Robin Chats *Cossypha heuglini* and two Chin-spot Batises *Batis molitor*. The birds were mobbing a black mamba coiled partly around a sharply angled tree that had fallen somewhat but that was still alive. Small twigs and leaves largely obscured the snake, which was about 2 m in length. Most of the calling birds sporadically darted over the back of the coiled snake which moved slowly. We saw the snake's head come round the tree, then go behind it, as the mamba very slowly moved its coiled body while the birds called continuously and occasionally darted at it. As one crombec swooped by the snake's back and went below the tree, we saw the snake strike out at it from the lower side of the tree; the crombec had flown from above to below the snake at about 15 cm from it, and the bird was hit and fell into dense undergrowth below the tree. The mamba immediately released its hold and dropped from the tree straight down to the undergrowth below. The other birds scattered but continued to call at a greater (5-10 m) distance from the tree.

About a minute later the mamba reappeared carrying the crombec, barely visible in its mouth. The snake climbed up another small leaning tree, but then detected us, or was otherwise frightened; at any rate it rapidly slid down the tree and moved downslope and speedily away, feathers of the crombec still visible at the edge of its mouth.